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Synopsis

Transgressing the boundaries of time, space and context Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) stands as one of the most sustaining and resonant myths of modern literature. Defoe's text has been subjected to severe rediscovery, reinterpretation and retelling, resulting in a huge body of literature which are variations on the Robinson theme, and are generalized under the umbrella term of Robinsonades, coined by Schnabel. The major Robinsonades of the twenieth century in literature which this thesis intends to study are J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), Muriel Spark's *Robinson* (1958), Michel Tournier's *Friday* (1967) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Some cinematic Robinsonades included for this research are Edward Sutherland's *Mr. Robinson Crusoe* (1932), Luis Bunuel's *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), George Miller / Rod Hardy *Robinson Crusoe* (1996), Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1975), Caleb Deschanel's *Crusoe* (1989) and Robert Zemeckis' *Cast Away* (2000). The thesis aims to locate the cultural politics and representative strategies in these select Robinsonades.

The major theoretical approaches to rewriting texts in literature and cinema have been through terms like *myth, intertextuality, dialogism* (term used by Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*) and film theories on *adaptation*. Literary works may be regarded as 'mythopoeic,' tending to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world . Roland Barthes in his attempt to demystify the politics of 'mythologisation,' challenges the 'innocence' and 'naturalness' of cultural texts and practices. He suggests that what we accept as 'natural' is in fact an illusory reality, constructed in order to mask the real structures of power, controlled by the bourgeoisie to circulate erroneous beliefs and encourage conformity to its own values (*Mythologies* 227).

Another important term relevant in this context is the notion of *intertextuality*. The term *intertextuality* or *intertextualite* was first coined by Julia Kristeva in her essay 'The Bounded Text.' According to her any text is a "permutation of texts, an intertextuality," since all texts invoke and rework other texts in a rich and ever evolving cultural matrix (36). So the destabilizing of the authority of the original text does enable plural and sometimes conflicting production of meaning.

This thesis intends to raise the following questions − Why has *Robinson Crusoe* attracted such rewritings? How can these rewritings be related to contemporary society? Can the various Robinsonades be grouped under distinct patterns? What variations do they reveal and how do

they reflect the concerns of society? Having outlived the theoretical strategies and readings of the 'Crusoe myth' the following section will look at the ways in which *Robinson Crusoe* has been seen as utopias and dystopias of social concerns / dreams in the twentieth century. Crusoe's story of wish-fulfilment can be easily identified with the concept of the American Dream which promised equal opportunity to everyone, regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Translated into the American mythology, *Robinson Crusoe* is the classic story of a real estate developer who builds a physical and moral replica of the world he had left behind. Americanizing the 'Crusoe myth' Edward Sutherland directed *Mr. Robinson Crusoe*. Steve Drexel, the modern Crusoe, taking a bet, plunges overboard from the yatch, swims to a nearby uninhabited island and recreates civilization by carving a miniature city of Fifty-Second Street and Park Avenue out of the jungle. Drexel embodies the fiery optimism and the can-do spirit of early twentieth-century America. He creates a utopia furnished by ingenious devices of his own fashioning. The text thus becomes an index of the aspirations and belief in the American Dream.

The obverse can be seen in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where the essential Hobbesean nature of man is foregrounded. A group of school boys get stranded on a Crusoesque island and after some initial attempts at maintaining order and decorum soon degenerate into a horde of murderous savages. The book is an anti-Robinsonade in the sense that it inverts the utopia that was created on Crusoe's island and portrays how the inherent evil in man's nature threatens order in society. Thus both utopian and dystopic rewritings can be located within the grid of the concerns and anxieties of contemporary authors and readers. Robert Zemecki's *Cast Away* too reverses the optimism of the Crusoe figure reducing him to a bare existence.

Eighteenth century interpretations of *Robinson Crusoe* have seen the novel as an example of Christian man moving from 'original sin' to 'salvation' and 'redemption.' Subsequent interpretations have seen him as 'natural man' and the '*homo economicus*.' It is in the twentieth century, that the patterns of exploitation and colonialism that Crusoe perpetrates have been analyzed through post colonial concerns and the focus has been shifted to the Crusoe – Friday relationship. In Tournier's book *Friday*, the name of the slave displaces that of his master, suggesting that the narrative would radically diverge from that of Defoe's. Initially there is a progressive parity between the two texts, where we find both the Crusoes shipwrecked on a desert island, recovering fortuitously some tools from the wreck and reconstructing the essence of their former existence in an alien surrounding. Of course both of them were provided with Fridays to stave off the madness of solitude, and enjoy the power of governance. The narrative diverges from the incident of the explosion in the cave, after which Crusoe follows Friday's style of living. Tournier's text interrogates the eighteenth century British codes of civilization and order and suggests an alternative mode of living. The concrete Crusoe is finally liberated through Friday who symbolized the ether ─ his arrows, the kite and the aeolian harp.

Bunuel or Deschanel or Hardy-Miller's direction of the *Robinson Crusoe* films has been more or less faithful to the original text, differing only as much as they focussed on depicting the friendship between Friday and Crusoe. Jack Gold's film *Man Friday*, on the other hand, retells the story completely from Friday's point of view. It is Friday who finds the white man's beliefs and values useless, detestable and incomprehensible and assumes the role of his guide, teaching him to be generous, loving, joyful and the secret to enjoy life.

Coetzee's book *Foe* adapts the Crusoe story in order to write back to it from a revised political or cultural position. The voice of the 'other' in this novel is both literally and psychologically silenced. Friday's tongue has been cut out, possibly by slavers, possibly by the colonizing Crusoe himself. Friday remains silent till the end of the novel and Dominic Head notes, this is both "a resistance too, yet also the product of, the dominant discourse" (121). Friday's flute playing, his shameless dancing, his nonsensical writing and at the end his deafening silence become the semantic signifiers of the island, and all that is suppressed, oppressed or repressed in Defoe's master narrative.

Crusoe's identity as the patriarchal monarch of his own island immensely attracted the theoreticians working with feminism and sexuality. Sutherland experimented with this breach by introducing a female native 'Saturday' in his film *Mr. Robinson Crusoe*. Saturday is presented as both Drexel's servant and as a beautiful toy "Robinson Crusoe never had" (Drexel). Coetzee in *Foe* too, foregrounds the woman question when he makes Susan Barton, the central character in Crusoe's story.Susan had been shipwrecked on the hot sands of Crusoe's island,spent a number of years with him and even maintained a journal. Crusoe died on their way to rescue and out of loyalty to him Susan wants their story to be written and hence relied on (De) Foe's reputation as an empirical author. The novella gets complicated by the layers of intertextual references embedded in it. Foe, meddling with the truth, erases Susan from Crusoe's story altogether and makes her the base material for another of his story *Roxana* (1724), thus Coetzee interrogates the very veracity of Defoe's novel.

Tournier's *Friday* further complicates the issue of sexuality by a sub-Freudian reworking of Crusoe's sexual needs. Speranza, the island becomes Crusoe's sexual partner and his sexually charged descent into the cave reads as an initiation to the relationship he subsequently enjoys with it. Inspite of his later admiration of Friday's physical attributes, Cusoe entertains no sodomite desires for him and instead is seen improbably copulating with the rosy coombe, the result being the mandrake like growths across the island. But Robinson is betrayed when he discovers the striped mandrakes, the outcome of Speranza's adulterous relationship with Friday. Cuckolded and blinded with jealousy, the novel presents a complex projection of Crusoe's psyche, revealing in the process the profound irony of Crusoe's condition of womanlessness.

Thus the 'Crusoe myth' is seen to be adapted and culturally appropriated through out the ages, raising questions to its absences and silences and often providing a glimpse to that realm which has been meticulously left out by Defoe. This thesis would study some of the cinematic and literary Robinsonades together and expound how these gaps and fissures in Defoe's narrative find representation. What such a study would explore is the rationale of the choice of *Robinson Crusoe* as a way to highlight and respond to patterns of discourse relevant to contemporary society with a degree of urgency. It is this dynamics of society, text, author and reader that the thesis seeks to probe.

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